

**Ambassador Feinstein's Remarks
to Freedom House Belarus HDIM Event**

October 3, 2011

- Thank you for this chance to comment. Before I get into U.S.-Polish cooperation on Belarus, I want to say thank you to Freedom House and the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) for producing this report and for organizing this event on the sidelines of HDIM.
- I am heartened to see someone with the experience and wisdom of David Kramer in the position of Freedom House president. The organization has played a valuable role in the last seven decades in promoting bipartisan ideas in America and universal values around the world.
- Just one example was a lunch I hosted together with Freedom House last year at my Residence here in Warsaw to connect Jordanian and Egyptian democracy activists with Polish experts. This was of course before the Arab Spring, but it's the type of cooperation that continues to this day as both Poland and Freedom House share their expertise from Belarus to Benghazi.
- I also appreciate the important function CEPA under Wess Mitchell is fulfilling as a relative newcomer on the scene in providing fresh analysis and policy ideas on Central Europe.
- Finally, I want to say thank you to Ambassador David Johnson, the experienced head of the U.S. delegation to this

OSCE HDIM meeting. Ambassador Johnson has been working to ensure that the situation in Belarus is at the top of the agenda at an important international forum like HDIM. He has jointly hosted public and private meetings for the Belarusian opposition with our Polish colleagues, showing our transatlantic solidarity with democratic forces there.

- This report is a serious contribution to the international discussion about Belarus's future. I particularly appreciate the multi-functional and multi-lateral approach of the report. Helping the Belarusian people achieve a democratic future cannot be done by one country, nor through economic or political mechanisms alone.
- Tonight I'd like to highlight Poland's role as a model for Belarus's democratic future and as an extremely active partner in working towards that worthy goal. I'd like to thank Polish MFA Eastern Department Director Artur Michalski, who is with us here, for his efforts to keep Belarus on the international agenda and to work with the U.S. to address it.
- Last week's Eastern Partnership summit was a good example of Poland's efforts to direct EU attention and resources to assisting these six countries. It is unfortunate that the Lukashenka regime in Minsk does not seem interested in cooperating with the West to improve the lives of its people, particularly given the difficult economic situation there.

- Let us hope that the EU's efforts to cooperate more closely with countries like Ukraine and Moldova, through concrete steps like a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and eventual visa liberalization, will help their citizens and serve as a model for Belarus.
- The United States and Poland must continue to send a principled message of transatlantic support and solidarity for Belarus's future. President Obama and Secretary Clinton have joined Europe in firmly calling for the immediate, unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners.
- We welcome Saturday's release of presidential candidate Dmitry Uss, but will not be fooled by such sporadic releases of political prisoners. Last week's announcement of a travel ban on *Gazeta Wyborcza* correspondent Andrzej Poczobut for alleged defamation only confirms the disregard for basic freedoms in Belarus.
- The United States, in concert with Poland and our European partners, will continue to maintain economic sanctions, asset freezes, and travel restrictions against those in Belarus responsible for the repression after the December 19 presidential elections which clearly failed to meet OSCE standards. These include new economic sanctions announced by President Obama in August on four Belarusian state-owned enterprises.

- Together, the U.S. and the EU have sent a clear signal, but we must remain in lockstep moving forward. There cannot be daylight between our positions.
- These actions are not directed against the people of Belarus. An integral component of U.S. policy has been to increase support for the people of Belarus as they seek to build a modern, democratic and prosperous society.
- Towards that end, the United States, Poland and the EU are cooperating closely to assist civil society and all those interested in a democratic future for Belarus. The U.S. participated in the Solidarity with Belarus International Donors Conference that Poland organized in February. At that conference, we announced an increase of support this year by 30% to about \$15 million dollars for Belarusian human rights advocates, trade unions, youth and environmental groups, business associations and think tanks.
- Such American support for the Belarusian people would not be possible without the ideas and cooperation of NGO partners like Freedom House and CEPA, particularly in reaching Belarusian academics and students. Poland, for its part, is working to create a new European Endowment for Democracy, and has helped open the Office for Solidarity with Belarus and the Belarusian House in Warsaw.
- U.S. assistance, in close coordination with partners like Poland, is focused on ensuring the free flow of information

to the Belarusian people, both from inside Belarus and through broadcasting from neighbors.

- We are clear-eyed about the challenge in Belarus. Persuading Belarus's leaders to change course, and support democracy and the rule of law will not happen easily or quickly. As Foreign Minister Sikorski rightly pointed out, this will be a marathon, not a sprint.
- But we are determined to build a democratic Belarus. For as Secretary Clinton and Baroness Ashton said jointly in response to the post-election crackdown: "The Belarusian people deserve better."
- Thank you and I look forward to a productive discussion this evening.